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Fun in the Power Plant. Edutainment in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone Tourism

Abstract: In the recent years, there has been a significant rise in the popularity of tours organized to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (CEZ). A visit paid to the Zone usually exceeds the basic understanding of the Zone raised on stereotypes and opens a new horizon of deeper exploration of the complexity of this site. The aim of the chapter is to depict the educational potential of the tours organized to the Zone (not necessarily limiting themselves to the issues connected simply with the nuclear energy). The particular attention will be paid to the tension between education and entertaining that is considered to be a fundamental facet of visitors engagement in the intellectual process. Presentation of this topic will be based on a content analysis of the programs, participant observation and interviews with the organizers.

Keywords: heritage, entertainment, education, Chernobyl, tourism

Introduction

In the recent years, there has been a rise in the popularity of tours organized to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone (CEZ). The Zone is a displaced area under the strict control of the Ukrainian State responsible for its security. It is not only a site of memory, a physical space symbolizing a nodal event for Ukrainian memory and identity, but also a large nature reserve, where nature has been developing practically unhindered for over 30 years. While its presence in the global popular culture (i.e. video game “S.T.A.L.K.E.R.”) strongly stimulates tourism imaginaries, the continued high levels of radioactivity of some areas and “post-apocalyptic” state of material object makes the experience of visiting the Zone both risky and exiting. A visit paid to the Zone usually exceeds the basic understanding of the Zone raised on stereotypes and opens a new horizon of deeper exploration of the complexity of this site. The aim of the chapter is to depict the educational potential of the tours organized to the Zone (not necessarily limiting themselves to the issues connected simply with the nuclear energy). The particular attention will be paid to the tension between education and entertaining that is considered to be a fundamental facet of visitors’ engagement in the intellectual process.

Tourism in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Numbers and in Tourism Studies

The CEZ has been established in Ukraine in an area with a radius of approximately 30 kilometers from the power plant, the territory most affected by radioactive waste after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. It is an area the population must not live, no economic activity would be carried out, and no food can be produced¹. However, already in the 90s the first visitors started to appear in the Zone after obtaining a special permission from the Ukrainian government. The situation changed significantly in 2011 when the area was opened for official visitors under the regulations of the Ukrainian State Agency on Exclusion Zone Management. Since then, it is observed that there is a dynamic increase in the number of visitors to the CEZ: 8,000 tourists visited the Zone in 2010, almost 18,000 in 2013, and 36,000 in 2016 during the 30th anniversary of the disaster (almost 25,000 of whom were non-residents). In 2017, the number of visitors to the Zone reached 50,000 and 63 thousand in 2018. From January until the end of May 2019, the Zone was visited by as many tourists as in jubilee 2016 (almost 36 thousand)². It is believed that the spring tourism boom, particularly visible for non-residents, is due to the huge popularity of the HBO series “Chernobyl”, which not only gained critical acclaim, but also spectacular ratings (the fifth and final episode of the series was viewed by more than 2 million people in the US alone (Welsch, 2019) as well as audience support (on IMDb, over 280,000 users gave the show an average rating of 9.6 stars out of 10, making it the highest rated TV show on the platform (Stolworthy, 2019).

In recent years, a number of papers focusing on various aspects of visiting the CEZ have been published. One of the first researchers who focused on the process of ruination of the abandoned city of Pripayat was Paul Dobraszczuk (2010). In the consecutive year Goatcher and Brundsen (2011) presented their study on the emotional encounters of visits to the Zone and propose to use the

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- 1 This area and its existing legal order are defined in the document: ‘*On the legal status of the territory which was contaminated by radioactive radiation as a result of the Chernobyl disaster of 1991*’ (and subsequent changes), see Про правовий режим території, що зазнала радіоактивного забруднення внаслідок Чорнобильської катастрофи, <http://zakon0.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/791%D0%B0-12>, Retrieved July. 10, 2019.
 - 2 ЗОСТАННЯ КІЛЬКОСТІ КІЛЬКОСТІ ВІДВІДУВАЧІВ ЗОНИ ВІДЧУЖЕННЯ В РОЗРІЗІ 1 КВАРТАЛУ 2018–2019, <https://cotiz.org.ua/novyny/stat1kv/>, Retrieved July. 10, 2019.

term “sublime” in order to depict the special psychological state of person being in the Zone (Hannam and Yankowska, 2017). The specific character of the CEZ attracted attention of Philip Stone who, in his seminal paper published from 2013, compared the unique exclusiveness of the Zone’s space to the Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (Stone 2013). The environmental degradation of the CEZ served as an argument for Yankowska and Hannam (2014, p. 932) to label visits to the CEZ both as dark tourism and toxic tourism, stressing that this form of exploration “can provide a strong educational experience, raising awareness about the current environmental issues and the polluted environmental conditions around us” (Hannam and Yankowska, 2014, p. 937). However, the space of the Zone is being consequently mythologized particularly, thanks to the popular culture (Banaszkiewicz and Duda, 2019) and the visual representations easily accessible in virtuality (Banaszkiewicz and Skinner, forthcoming). Mediatization undoubtedly contributes to the treatment of the CEZ “an open-air museum of dark legends” (Afanasiev and Afanasieva, 2018, p. 38), where authenticity of physical space is the subject of performative interventions (Banaszkiewicz, 2018) but also a dissonant heritage that can stimulate intercultural dialogue (Banaszkiewicz 2020). The above studies do not exhaust the scope of issues and research problems related to the intensive process of the Zone touristification, on the one hand, and the representation of the Chernobyl disaster and the CEZ area in culture on the other. The two areas permeate each other, mutually stimulating strategies for the interpretation of the post-catastrophic heritage.

Education and Entertainment in Tourism

An attempt of holistic explanation of the phenomenon of tourism can be reduced to two concepts. The first, recognizing tourism as a “secular pilgrimage” implies that a tourist is motivated by the search of meaning, discovering authenticity and transformation of a subject that offers different experience, seeing them in the search for pleasure and entertainment, thus allowing tourists detachment from everyday worries and responsibilities (Boorstin, 1977 Pfaffenberger 1983). The concept reaches into the roots of the humanistic reflection on the condition of man, perceived as a working being. As Władysław Okoń wrote, referring to Aristotle: “Fun is a consequence of work understood as fatigue. Where is work, there must be fun, because tiredness requires rest [. . .]” (Okoń, 1995, 60). Leisure time intended even for travel stands in opposition to economic activity and, therefore, is to give pleasure impossible to get while working, identified with the duty, seriousness and responsibility. According to Johann Huizinga

(1944), the author of a classic view of man as *homo ludens* – playful creature – this “unseriousness”, which is a free action, is a quintessence of fun.

However, while according to Huizinga, fun can be a deadly serious matter and is simply a property of culture that cannot be assessed as good or bad, entertainment, that is simply just fun, is a product in consumer culture, and is threat to adults getting infantile of the scale on alarming proportions. James E. Combs (2010) and Neil Postman (2000), we are entering a new phase in human history, permeated by fun to such an extent that it can be described as a world of fun. Entertainment is a distinctive form of mass culture, which, at the same time, is a consumer culture. Therefore, there is no consumer culture without entertainment. Consequently, tourists are hedonistically oriented consumers, desirous for still new experience stimulating their emotions (Bauman 1996, Salazar 2010).

Tourism based on products that give pleasure and relaxation, referred to as 3S (sun, sea, sand), has become a designate of the most popular type of mass travels, i.e., rest at resorts in warm countries. However, with the tremendous development of tourism over the last 25 years, there has occurred, which was a part of global consumption trends, the needs of tourists, and consequently change in offers. Shifting significance from product (possessions) to experience (collecting experience) (Pine & Gilmore 1999), which has become a pillar of a cathedra of consumerism of the 21st century, found its reflection in travelling (Urry & Larsen 2011). In many cases, the 3S has been replaced by 3E (entertainment, education, excitement). Moving away from mass tourism based on environmental values, and consequently turning to individual tourism based on active involvement from a tourist, as well as increasing share of tourism product of cultural tourism category, is a characteristic trend observed globally in the recent years.

Entertainment has not been abandoned, but was put in a triad along with education, i.e., cognitive element and excitement, i.e. “experience”, strong and positive emotional stimulus (Robinson & Picard 2016). In relation to the increasingly common educational strategy of gamification, tourism also recognizes elements characteristic of the game world, and which are referred to as 3F (fun, friends, feedback). It is not so much fun as entertainment among friends aimed at achieving further goals, which are counted and recorded in the form of feedback (e.g. points, badges, tokens) that becomes the axis of creating tourist programs, especially for young people. Not looking far, such an approach has its roots in the scout movement, where the basis of upbringing is action. The involvement of tourists in the process of experiencing travel more than just passive gaze can be referred to as a theoretical framework for the concepts of

experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 1999, Urry & Larsen 2011) that puts in the center of exchange not products or services but experiences.

Highlighting the correlation between effectiveness of education and presence of elements of entertainment in cognitive process is by no means a new phenomenon, however, growing in importance in recent decades, at heritage sites that are tailored to tourists' needs for entertainment. It is worth to remember, that not only scenarios of exhibitions or "ludic" projects translate into the effectiveness of educational process. The spectrum of motivation is its indispensable element as it guides a recipient (visitor, spectator, tourist). According to research cited by John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (2010, 79), better cognitive results are achieved, when a museum visitor has a high level of motivation: "As it would be expected, individuals voicing a strong educational motivation demonstrated significantly greater learning than did those expressing a low educational motivation. However, less expected, a similar relationship was found among those individuals voicing strong entertainment motivations. These significant differences were independent of the individual's expressed educational motivations." As it turns out, a pro-entertainment attitude results in better educational outcomes. When presenting a dissonant culture, it is particularly challenging to include solutions that allow to enjoy the fun. This is due to the fact that such heritage is not subject to harmonious interpretation. Ambivalence related to its perception requires people managing the heritage to be particularly delicate and intuition driven so that not to present a one-sided, subjective and over-simplified narrative of the past, in the name of striving for making heritage experience enjoyable.

Educational Nuclear Tourism in the CEZ

Currently, the trips to CEZ are organized by various tourist entities: both Ukrainian and foreign companies, mainly using the intermediation of local tour operators. It is hard to deny that such a dynamically developing Chernobyl tourism is already more and more mass in nature, which is supported by the Agency's recent activities (e.g. simplifications in the entry procedure, introduction of electronic tickets, adjustment of infrastructure to the needs of tourists) as well as unambiguous declarations of the new central authorities of Ukraine, which perceive the Zone as a tourist attraction of great potential³. Due to the

3 From the formal point of view, tourism activity as an economic activity for many years has been prohibited in the Zone. President Volodymyr Zelenskyon 10th July 2019 during the ceremony of handing over to Ukraine the construction protecting

needs of the market, the offer of tour operators is becoming more and more diversified. It is based, of course, on one-day excursions, the main point of which is a visit to Pripjat, but what is interesting, the biggest organizers of trips to the Zone try to shape their image as active heritage stakeholders and not only commercially oriented businesses. Naturally, a narrative about “the mission” can be an effective marketing tool, but the involvement in other projects related to the dissemination of knowledge about the Chernobyl brings objective educational fruits. The CHERNOBYLwel.com office cooperates with the National Museum of Chernobyl in Kiev and organizes the Chernobyling Festival⁴. Tour operators also organize graffiti cleaning and garbage collection actions in the Zone.

Educational profile of the activity is characteristic primarily for the enterprise called The Chornobyl Tour, also known as the Chernobyl Tour operating on the market since 2008. The name of this organizer appears in two language versions – Ukrainian language “Chornobyl Tour” (official name of the company) and English language “Chernobyl Tour” (used as a domain name and in promotional materials addressed to foreign tourists). This is an interesting example of how post-colonial geopolitics translates into tourism. The Anglophone world knows Chernobyl from the Russian language version (“Chernobyl”), not the Ukrainian (“Chornobyl”) or Belarusian (“Kharnobyl”). Hence, for foreign visitors, this is the name of the company. Its co-founder and a person responsible for the scientific layer of the tour, including the training of guides, is Sergii Mirnyi – one of the liquidators of the consequences of the accident at the power plant, often appearing on the international arena as an

the old Sarcophagus over the 4th reactor of the so-called New Ark, he signed a decree which is to be the beginning of “the transformation of the exclusion zone into one of the points of development of the new Ukraine”

<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/glava-derzhavi-pidpisav-ukaz-shodorozvitku-chornobilskoyi-z-56321> During his visit, the President called for an end to the corruption and bans on tourists and for the isolation zone to be turned into a future magnet for tourists and scientists.

- 4 Chernobyling is a three-day festival organized for the first time in 2017 in Slavutych. The idea is to bring Chernobyl issues closer to young people through concerts, seminars, meetings with interesting people and sightseeing (and also to revitalize the cultural life of the city). As the organizers declare, the income from the event is intended for self-residents. The official language of the festival is English. The second edition of the festival in 2018 is to be held in Kiev. See Chernobyling, <https://www.facebook.com/Chernobyling.festival/>

expert in Chernobyl matters⁵. As S. Mirnyi argues: “Back then we fought with physical, radiation contamination, and now we eliminate a different, informational kind: contamination of human brains by misconceptions and outright myths. In the Zone, radiation contamination is largely defeated, for it has been localized and REDUCED MORE THAN MILLION TIMES as compared with the first days of the disaster. But in human minds, in their thoughts, perception and imagination it continues to persist as “deadly dangerous” – as if the cleanup was never done. This causes enormous harm to the health and life of people and whole countries. So, in order to make radiation decontamination truly efficient – as it has turned out – one needs complement it with one more, informational cleanup. And, frankly, each time, when in the end of the day I with the group leave the Zone, I feel something similar to what I felt, driving out the column of radiation recon armiks back in 1986: that after my shift a bit more people have become safer, and the world slightly different – a bit cleaner and better a place.” (Chernobyl Tour – Mirnyi, https://chernobyl-tour.com/sergii_mirnyi_en.html)

Mirnyi postulates that the commercial activities of the company should be treated only as one of the forms of combating “information contamination”. (Chernobyl Tour - About, https://www.chernobyl-tour.com/about_us.html), which he repeatedly emphasizes in his interviews⁶. The Chornobyl Tour includes a research department, whose work is directly supervised by Mirnyi himself. His activity consists mainly in close cooperation with the media in the field of Chernobyl issues, and recently also in lobbying the political and social environment for the inclusion of the material heritage of the Zone (mainly the selected buildings of the Pripyat) on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The educational dimension is also to be characterized by trips to CEZ organized by

5 Sergii Mirnyi was a commander of radiation reconnaissance platoon in Chernobyl in 1986. Accept his involvement in the activities of the Chornobyl Tour as its scientific advisor, he is a writer and scriptwriter, and an internationally known expert in the Chernobyl Disaster and mitigation of ecological-social disasters. He is an author of books “Worse than radiation” and “7 odd Chernobyl stories” (Budapest: Bogar Kiado, 2001), “Chernobyl liquidators health as a psycho-social trauma” (Budapest: Bogar Kiado, 2001) and several dozen artistic and scientific publications, presentations at international conferences.

6 The following section on Chernobyl Tour activities is based on material collected from the 2017–2019 grant field research in Kiev and CEZ, in particular the in-depth interviews with Sergii Mirnyi Yaroslav Yaroslav Yemelianenko, Ann Merrill, Svitlana Priadko conducted in February 2019.

Chernobyl Tour. For this reason, every tour guide of the Chernobyl Tour Zion is bound by labour standards that can even be compared to corporate standards. After relevant training, a candidate for a guide takes an internal exam, which only entitles him to give a tour of the company's groups. What is more, the guides are obliged to use the substantive elaboration (type of script/trip scenario) and their work is checked by other guides and ghost clients.

All these measures are aimed at maintaining a high quality of service, although they also impose certain restrictions on the guides working for the company. In addition to the "standard" one-day program, which in its scope is relatively similar to the programs of competitors, Chernobyl Tour offers a deeper exploration program that can last from one to several days and includes places less obvious (e.g. fish and rodent scientific experimental base, Yaniv railway station, Paryshiv village, meeting with selfsettlers). In addition, interested parties may also book a private tour of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (that includes construction site of the new confinement "Arch", mockup hall at the Administrative and Service Complex (ASC-1) of the PDO, "golden corridor" extending through the building of the PDO, the control panel of the reactor, turbine hall, reactor hall, memorial to Valery Khodemchuk, buried under the ruins of the reactor and the room with the main circulation pumps).

In search of new customers, Chernobyl Tour has also created an unusual, as for Ukrainian conditions, offer of study trips of strictly educational character. It is aimed primarily at foreign visitors recruited from the academic community. In order to develop educational programs, Mirnyi has partnered with Ann Merrill, a US-based specialist in organizing international educational programs, coordinating academic projects, and with extensive experience in NGO's in the socioeconomic environment of Eastern Europe. The result of this cooperation is a program of specialist thematic excursions, which can be attended mainly by foreign students, mainly from science faculties. In 2018 the Chernobyl Tour organized visits to the Zone for about 85 students and professors from the USA, UK, Azerbaijan, Norway, the Netherlands, South Korea, Germany, and Japan. Their interests ranged from engineering (including nuclear, industrial, materials science), radioecology and radiobiology, social and ecological resilience, and "dark" tourism. Interestingly, the study groups are not limited to nuclear exploration, but also present lesser-known themes such as the heritage of WWII and the Cold War.

At this point it is worth emphasizing the importance of research department in the process of creating new tourist products. A good example is the latest thematic excursion organized by Chernobyl Tour in a weekly cycle since June 2019. The "HBO Chernobyl" TOUR series is Chernobyl's direct response

to the dizzying popularity of the series “Chernobyl” and aims to “revealing to the secrets and real stories of the events that occurred”. (https://chernobyl-tour.com/serial_chernobyl_hbo_tour_ukraine_en.html). During the tour, both “must see” points, which did not have much meaning for the series itself, but are the Amusement Park of Prypiat with the world-famous Ferris wheel or the lunch of power plant employees in the canteen of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, as well as authentic spaces were taken into account, which are the location of the series of events (the basement of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, in which the liquidation headquarters was located in the first days after the explosion of the fourth power unit or, the fire department from which the first firefighters left for the scene, the medical unit of the city of Pripjat, which received the first victims, the legendary bridge of Pripjat town). There will also be an “entertainment” point (a ride in an armored patrol vehicle, in which the liquidators in 1986 made a radiation reconnaissance, making the first radiation contamination maps), but also a cognition of “the real stories of people whose characters were reflected at the series” I as promised by the organizers “some of them you can even meet in person”.

What is important, before the new program was added to the offer, it was preceded by analytical work on the compatibility of the series with reality and social consultations with representatives of the Kyiv magistrate, among others. At this stage, a meeting with witnesses of the 1986 events, open to the general public, was particularly important, thanks to the personal contacts of Sergei Mirnyi.⁷ Of course, there is no doubt that such events contribute to the increase of media recognition of the agency itself (which, shortly after the development of the new route, organized a special study tour for media representatives). At the same time, the use of the potential of popular culture for edutainment seems to be a very effective tool, as it reaches out to people who would most likely not benefit from a more scientific offer, as in the case of educational programs.

7 During a meeting held on June 5, 2019, the newly opened Chernobyl Hub, a club in the courtyard of the Chernobyl Tour office in Kiev, the gathered guests watched the last episode of the HBO series together and then took part in a discussion with guests: Sergei Paryszyn, who participated in the first meeting of the crisis staff in the bunker under the power plant management building, Alexei Breus – the operator of the fourth block, who began his shift on April 26, 1986. at 7 a.m., Alexei Ananenko – participant of the diving mission in flooded rooms under the reactor and Sergiey Mirnyi. The report from the event can be viewed at the link: Учасники аварії на ЧАЕС обговорюють серіал CHERNOBYL HBO, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=2DR8QnuzZE,

Regardless of the subject matter and length of the trip, Chernobyl Tour focuses on combining elements of education and entertainment, both at the level of content and in the realization of the programs themselves: knowledge is conveyed through anecdotes, universalization, and analogies, and guiding strategies are based on intensive dialogue with the audience, performative involvement of the visitors, provoking them to reflect and interpret themselves.

Educational trips for Chernobyl Tour are only a supplement to the basic offer, which is well characterized by the aforementioned acronym 3F. In turn, the Polish organizer of the “Zero Zone”, which will be presented in this chapter as the second case study, oscillates much more on the border of science than entertainment. From the formal point of view, the Zero Zone can be classified as a tourism organiser (it has a relevant legal entity), although the website repeatedly emphasizes the untypical nature of the offer, created by a group of enthusiasts, former students of the Warsaw University of Technology, who in 2007 went to Chernobyl for the first time. After establishing cooperation with the Polish Nucleonic Society, they started to organize trips regularly and are currently the oldest Polish organizer of trips to CEZ. The main pilot and guide in the Zone is Dr. Marek Rabiński, a member of the Polish Nucleonic Society and an employee of the National Research Centre in Świerk, although the trips often involve other employees of the National Centre for Nuclear Research and people professionally professionally or amateurishly interested in nuclear energy. The local guide Sergey Akulinin, a former operator of reactor turbine no. 2 in Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and a participant in the accident liquidation action, is a permanent collaborator of the Zero Zone on the spot. As the tour operators emphasize, referring to the “scientific” profile of the tour guides, “this does not mean that the trip is only for scientists. The trip is for everyone (with small restrictions). The participation of researchers ensures that the trip is safe for health”. (Zero Zone, <https://strefazero.org/index.php?id=6#>). The organizers, being aware that too much “science” can be a deterrent, try to cut the program so that its entertainment elements balance the educational element.

As in the case of thematic trips organized by Chernobyl Tour, Zero Zone trips are not one-day trips – participants spend an average of 2–3 days in CEZ and the program is much more flexible than in the case of “standard” trips. In the tab presenting the specificity of trips, very strongly (both verbally and visually, as can be seen in the attached illustration), highlights the difference between the “The Zero Zone” and other tour operators consisting in greater involvement of the tourist himself (see Fig. 1):



TO NIE JEST TYPOWA WYCIECZKA Z BIUREM
PODRÓŻY.
U nas masz głos dotyczący kształtu wyjazdu.

Fig. 1: Extract from the description of the trip from the “Zero Zone” website (screenshot), source: Zero Zone, <https://strefazero.org/?id=104&ArticleId=145>, date of access: 16.07.2019

The organizers strongly dissociate themselves from the stereotypical image of a tourist trip: “With us you will definitely see more and feel the atmosphere that constantly accompanies today’s employees of the closed Chernobyl zone. On our tour, you are an explorer, not a tourist.”

Indeed, the program of the expedition is a framework and the organizers give a lot of freedom to the participants of the trip, not only by declaring on the website that “In Pripjat the participants receive from us maps of the city and explore what they want. If the situation does not require us to do so, we do not force anyone to walk in a group”. (Zero Zone, <https://strefazero.org/?id=104&ArticleId=145>, access: 16.07.2019) Thanks to good agreements with local guides and Agency staff, the Zero Zone actually offers more exploration opportunities. The first difference between the basic program of a one-day trip organized by a mass organizer and the program of a standard group of Zero Zone (trips) is logistics – Zero Zone groups live in Slavutych and enter the Zone area by an extraterritorial employee train. During the three days of the visit, the group explores, among others V and VI power plant block and a mink research farm, St. Ilija’s Church from 1789, barge dump, cemetery of old fortresses, a monument to partisans from World War II, Yanov station, and Burakivka equipment dump. As you can see, the program definitely extends the list of attractions in relation to what a one-day tourist visits, including also those places that are not directly related to the disaster itself, but present the heritage of Polesie before the outbreak.

In addition to daily exploration of the abandoned buildings of the Pripjat on your own, there is a possibility of visiting the interior of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, although admission to it is additionally paid from April 2018. The organizers of the trips try to enter the current of popularization of knowledge at all costs. A sightseeing program combining elements of scientific cognition (such as detailed mini lectures on the functioning of power plants or nuclear power engineering) and entertainment (urbex character of cognition of the Pripjat) is the implementation of this strategy. It is important, however, that

the “Zero Zone” also tries to shape its image on this basis, cooperating with the creators of YouTube (MocnyVlog, Tube Riders, Urbex History, Potato) and Polish media giants (TVN, Onet, TVP). In the spring of 2019 she organized a trip with two famous YouTubers, Krzysztof Gonciarz and the creator of “Uwaga Naukowy Bełkot” (“Attention Scientific Gibberish”), which resulted in a documentary miniseries about the Zone (Chernobyl 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRIPPC8uohcdT1a-DW7pH4IWPTeLcdeov>) and two episodes of popular science blog (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmPry7Gr0-M>). Both the forum and the fanpage on Facebook “Zero Zone” have a mixed character combining historical facts, facts about nuclear power, news from the Zone, and information about trips to the Zone.

Summary and Conclusions

The idea behind this chapter was to present an educational offer of tour operators specializing in creating trips to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. There is no doubt that the Zone has become a popular tourist attraction in recent years. Regardless of its formal status, the interest of tourists, not only from year to year, but also from month to month, is growing, which makes both the space of the Exclusion Zone undergo changes and the range of tourism organizers’ offer changes. On the one hand, the growing range of programs is intended to respond to the heterogeneous needs of tourists, and on the other hand, the creation of new products stimulates the number and profile of visitors. In the analysis of the case studies cited above, it was attempted to demonstrate that the sightseeing programs combine elements of education and entertainment to a varying degree. Firstly, it is a consequence of general trends observed in tourism (regardless of whether they are acronym 3E or 3F, the element of fun/entertainment is inalienable), secondly, the tourist potential of the Zone itself, whose heritage is not only limited to post-catastrophic value. The fact that both factors, or both sides of the same coin, i.e., supply and demand, are taken into account allows a better understanding of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone tourism phenomenon. The nuclear issue, although it seems to be the basic thematic axis of the trip to the Zone, is one of many threads that can be explored in its space. In-situ experience offers great opportunities for interpretation with regard to the issues of nuclear energy, so it can be assumed that programs profited in terms of nuclear tourism will continue to be developed.

Acknowledgements

The article is a result of a project financed by the National Science Centre in Poland (no. 2016/23/D/HS3/01960).

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